

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

BASIS AND NEED FOR DECISION

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision and rationale for approving the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the lands administered by the Malheur National Forest

Throughout this ROD, I have used many technical terms which may be unfamiliar to a large segment of the public. Please refer to the FOREST PLAN, CHAPTER VI, GLOSSARY which contains definitions for many of these terms.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Proposed Forest Plan were filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and made available to the public on August 14, 1987. A Notice of Availability was published in the *Federal Register* on that same date. News releases were prepared for the media throughout Oregon. Additional detail on the meetings, notices, and documents preceding the FEIS and Forest Plan is available in the FEIS, CHAPTER V.

AUTHORITY

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Forest Plan were developed under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 219). The FEIS satisfies the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500).

The Forest Plan is part of the framework for long-range planning established by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA). The Forest Plan establishes general direction for 10 to 15 years, and must be revised at least every 15 years [36 CFR 219.10(q)]. The Forest Plan replaces previous resource management plans including:

- The Malheur National Forest Timber Resource Management Plan
- The John Day Unit Plan
- The Silvies-Malheur Unit Plan
- The South Fork Unit Plan

Subject to valid existing rights, all permits, contracts, and other instruments for the use and occupancy of National Forest System land will be in conformance with the Forest Plan at the earliest possible date, generally within three years.

AFFECTED AREA

The Malheur National Forest is located on the east side of the Cascade Mountain Range in eastern Oregon, approximately equidistant from the borders of Washington, Idaho and Nevada. The planning area includes the entire Malheur National Forest located in Grant, Harney, Baker, and Malheur Counties.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Pursuant to the intent of NFMA, the Malheur National Forest conducted an active public involvement program throughout the Forest planning process. Formal public involvement activities included consultations with Federal, State, and local government agencies; formal public comment periods on draft documents; and numerous meetings, presentations, and information distributions (See FEIS, SUMMARY, CHAPTER V, and FOREST PLAN, CHAPTER III).

In March 1988 the Forest invited all those who commented on the Proposed Forest Plan and Draft EIS to participate as a member of a "Citizens Working Group." The purpose of the working group was to bring together a group of interested and affected publics, representing a variety of viewpoints regarding the management of the Malheur National Forest, to discuss the Forest Plan.

Two meetings were held. The first, in April, 1988 was a preliminary meeting to update the participants, build rapport and understanding, and identify a smaller group to meet for a two day meeting in May. The second "Citizens Working Group" meeting was held in May with a group of 21 representatives chosen by the larger April meeting group. The objectives of this second meeting were to (1) continue to build rapport among participants, (2) review preliminary results of the analysis of issues, (3) review information about issues developed at the first meeting; (4) explore potential areas of agreement among participants, and (5) narrow the scope of and/or clarify areas of continuing disagreement.

Recommendations presented to the Regional Forester by the Forest were formulated using information and suggestions developed by the entire array of public input.

In addition to the formal activities, Forest employees informally explained the purpose of the Forest Plan and how to effectively participate in the process to many different publics who either requested information or whom employees may have come in contact with through work or in the community.

ISSUES

Land and resource management planning began with the identification of issues and concerns through public contacts with local civic and community organizations, individuals, local, State, and Federal agencies, private industries; adjacent landowners, various interest groups, Native American tribes, and Forest Service employees. During the early planning stages, over 30 issues and concerns were identified. Some of these issues were beyond the jurisdiction of the USDA Forest Service, resolved by existing laws, or best handled on a case-by-case basis. These issues are not addressed in the Forest Plan or FEIS. The remaining issues which indicated a need to examine current management direction, were then grouped based on common

elements and similarities. These issues (described in detail in the FEIS, CHAPTERS I and V, and the FOREST PLAN, CHAPTER III) are specifically addressed in this ROD in SECTION III, RATIONALE FOR THE DECISIONS. They center on the following issue areas:

- Riparian Areas
- Big-game Habitat
- Roadless Areas
- Economic Stability
- Timber Management
- Road Management

In addition to the primary issues listed above, which directed the NEPA process, there were numerous secondary issues and even some which surfaced late in the planning process. Additional issues which I felt were important in making my decision are:

- Forest Health
- Old Growth
- Visuals
- Native American Treaty Rights
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Ecosystem Diversity

WHAT THE FOREST PLAN IS, AND IS NOT

As a long-range strategy for managing the Malheur National Forest, the Forest Plan and accompanying FEIS are programmatic. The Forest Plan provides management direction to produce goods, services, and uses in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits. It is not a plan for the day-to-day administrative activities of the Forest; it does not address such matters as vehicle and equipment management or organizational structure.

The Forest Plan emphasizes the application of various management practices to achieve multiple use goals and objectives in an economically efficient and environmentally sound manner. It does not make site-specific decisions, but through standards and management area direction (displayed in FOREST PLAN, CHAPTER IV) significantly influences design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities. Standards are principles specifying conditions or levels of environmental quality to be achieved. They are the rules that govern resource management practices and are the key to successful implementation of the Plan. They will not be violated to achieve annual targets, or outputs. Management areas are geographic areas established by the Plan that have similar management objectives and a common management prescription.